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CEREBUS
mothers & daughters
12

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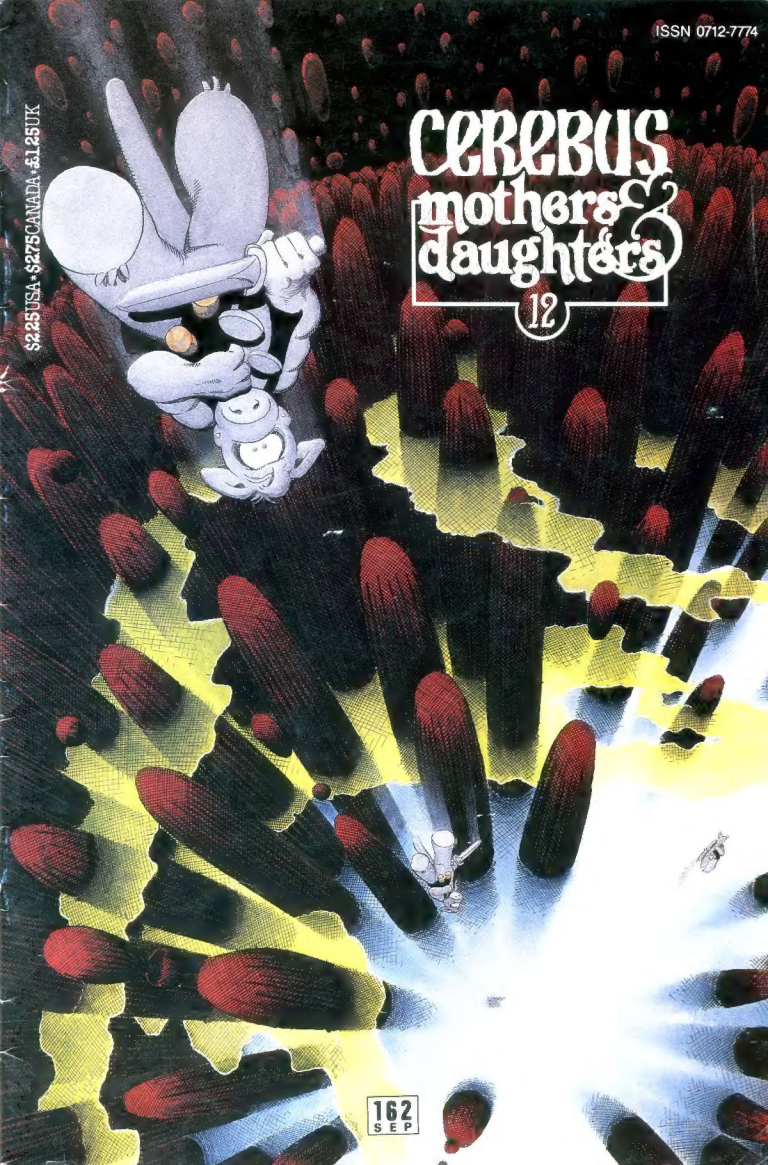

162
SEP

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

It's August 27 and we are *really* up against it this time. Gerhard took a week off in the middle of the month and I decided, what the hell, and did the same thing. I was in the studio, but I basically just answered the various phones and read a couple of books (a collection of George Orwell's essays and *The Crisis Years;* a new book on the relationship between Kennedy and Kruschev). Very relaxing, only now the pressure to get this issue done by Monday is unbelievable.

★★★★★★★★★★

Indianapolis was great. All of the interviews that I mentioned last issue went off like clockwork. I'd especially like to thank Kate DeGroot for all of her help way back last year on the media tips and advice on where to do the signing. She pushed for *25th Century Five and Dime* in Bloomington (which is actually about an hour north of Indy) since it is the store she shops at and I decided to go along with it. Great turn-out and a really, really nice college town. Michael Redman, the owner of *25th Century* is a great guy and I recommend the store highly to anyone considering doing a promotional appearance or Tour or somesuch — or just as a great place to shop. The convention went very well.

★★★★★★★★★★

Detroit was next. *Dave's Comics* is part of the signing circuit already, so they don't need any recommendation from me. I was sorry that Dave Hutzley wasn't there, but Scott and all the guys filled in admirably. I did an appearance at Friendly Frank's Distribution; Frank and Thom Powers and I debating distribution and what-not most of the afternoon. This one was the toughest nut to crack media-wise, only a couple of radio interviews, but one, with Bob Bauer at WXYT 1270 made it all worthwhile. We were supposed to be on the air live for fifteen minutes and instead we ended up filling the entire hour, with listener phone calls and everything. Jim Ottaviani sold copies of the Usenet Interview I've been doing the last while, making back his costs and a few dollars for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. $2.00 each from Jim at 1100 H.H. Dow Building, Engineering Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor MI, 48109-2136. I also did a full half hour segment of Hero Reviews, Detroit's cable access TV show on comics. The convention went great, again. The dealers I talked to said that they did very well which is good to hear.

★★★★★★★★★★

Toronto. Late addition to the Tour, to celebrate *the Beguiling*'s fifth anniversary (sorry *Halley's . . . the Beguiling* is the *real* number one store). Steve and Sean worked like trojans on this one and we got coverage in *Now, Eye*, the *Toronto Star* and a great piece on the CBC's channel 5 late news. Jim Slotek gave us a snarky mention in his column (that's okay; his lead was "the Top Ten Reasons Mick Jagger should stay with Jerry Hall", so the man is like a dufus among dufi) in the *Toronto Sun*. I also did Dave Drama's talk show. You can't beat a radio station where the first thing they do is offer you a beer. Alternative radio forever.

"On Time Tour '92" (my personal subtitle) suffered its first major loss in T.O. Previously, the latest I had been was 10 minutes at Midnight Comics in Albany. Unfortunately, I had to use a different limo company since Emerald was booked solid with weddings. I ended up getting Chico Marx for a driver (swear to God). Instead of Markham STREET which is downtown, he follows the signs to Markham ROAD which is in Scarborough (know affectionately in Southern Ontario as Scarberia). Shu' shu'. Atsa fine. Markham. I know way dat is. Don' yu worry 'bout a t'ing, boss. The signing ran a little over four hours. Big plus; Chester Brown joining us for dinner at Ralph's restaurant next door. Big minus; Joe Matt showing up at the signing and then leaving without saying hello and then not joining us for dinner. I never even got to rave about *Peep Show*.

★★★★★★★★★★

Atlanta was just a few days ago. Live interview on the noon news with Amanda Davis on CBS (yeah, really. Them again). A more leisurely interview with George Bryant for his "Games by George" segment, at independent station channel 46. He had just seen me on CBS, drawing Cerebus so he wanted me to do an "even better sketch" for channel 46, which I proceeded to do. The *Atlanta Journal* ran a nice half page piece including biographical information on Cerebus. The writer even asked me what Cerebus *weighs*. That's a first. I settled on "sixty pounds when he's sitting around drinking; ninety pounds when he's angry." Makes sense, eh? Did a strip for *Creative Loafing*, the local alternative paper which should be out sometime this week. The signing was at *Oxford Comics*, run by Mike Van Houten. And it was there that *Moondog's* record which has stood since late April was broken. The signing ran a little more than five hours. You did one hell of a job, Mike. Bob Burden got back from San Diego Friday night and called just when I was heading off to bed. He suggested a couple of drinks at *Ponytail*, the "titty bar" (what a great southern expression) where his girl-friend works. The wild shall wild remain. Right in the middle of a table dance he says "Oh, I almost forgot. You won the award in Dallas." Really? That's great! Which one. "The one you were up for." Bob, we were nominated for three. "Oh. I forget." It was late Saturday when I finally got a phone message under my door. "Dave — Best Cartoonist 1991 — Congratulations, Bob."

The Harvey Award was displayed proudly on our table throughout the Sunday Great Eastern Convention. A big thank you to everyone who voted for me. I'd especially like to thank the people Bob got to autograph the back of the award: Jaime Hernandez, Peter Bagge, Dan Clowes, Gary Groth (who added "not a creator, sorry"), Larry Reid ("me neither"), Reed Waller, Mark Schultz, Kate Worley, Al Williamson, Denis Kitchen, and of course Bob "keep your eye on the donut" Burden.

★★★★★★★★★★

Okay, I've got to go downstairs and hit those pages. I will just take time to mention that I will be doing a small U.K. Tour and the UKCAK convention in the fall of 1993 and Australia in February of 1994 and Canada in the summer of 1994. Later.

CEREBUS

NO. 162 SEPTEMBER 1992

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 188)

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 189 to Cerebus 200)

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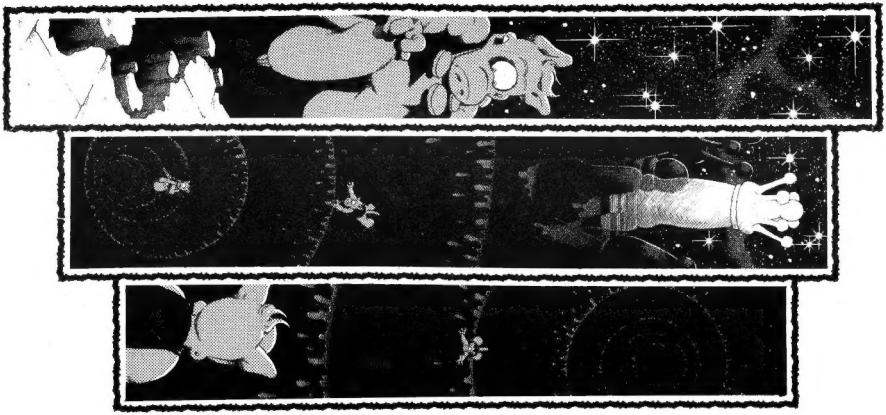
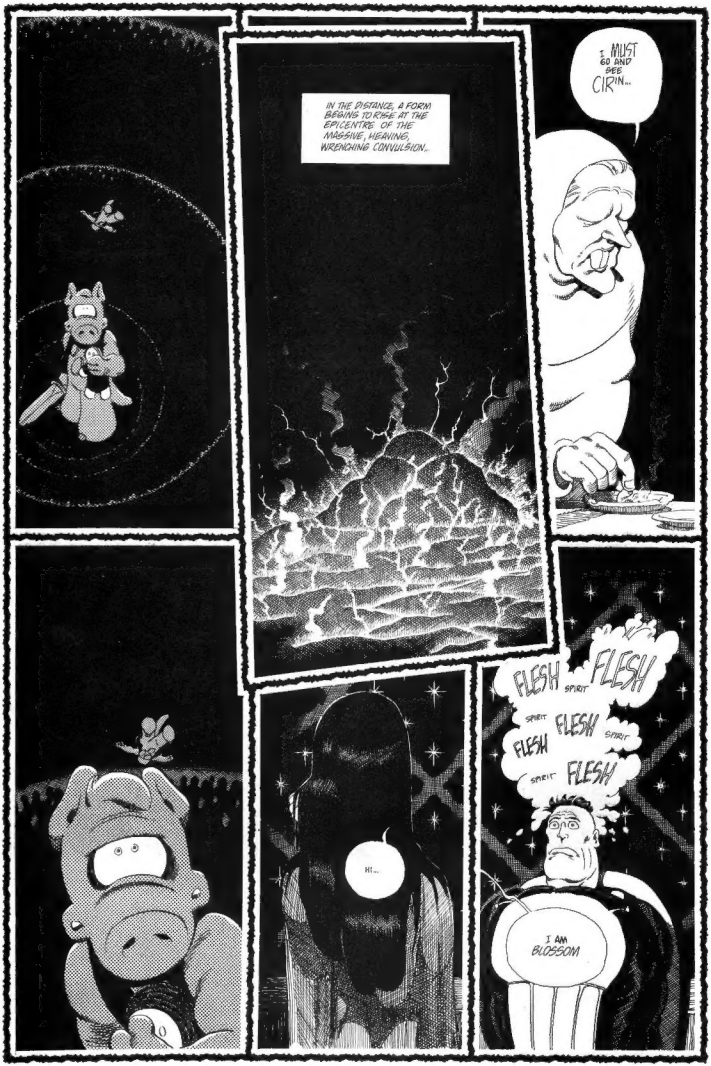
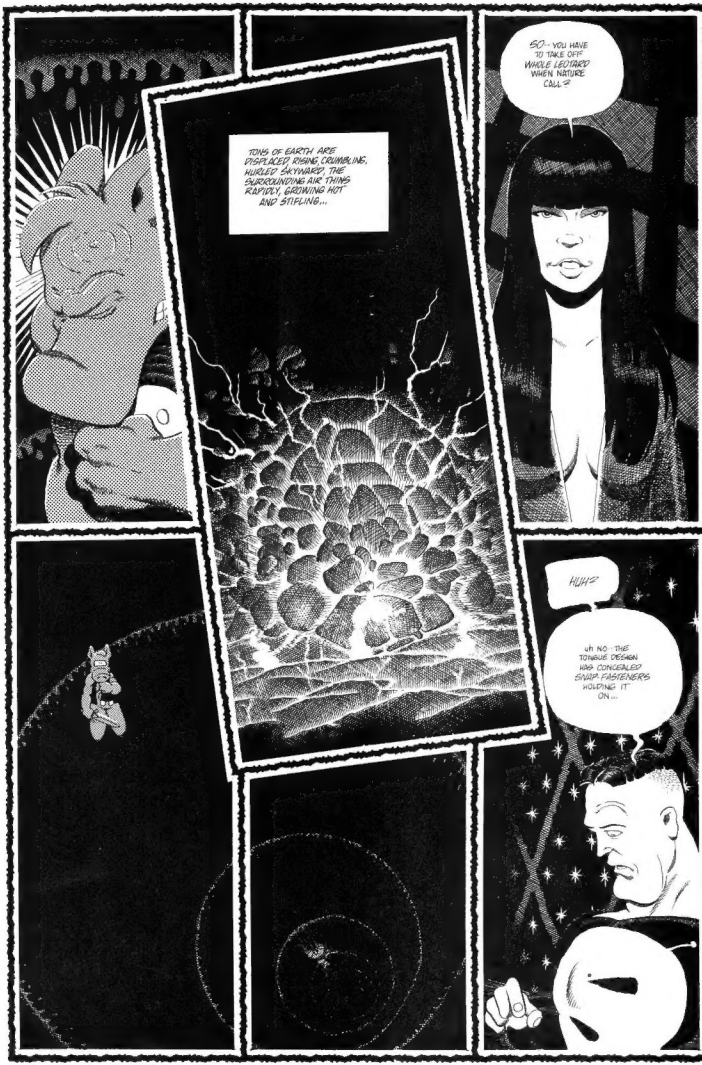



I MUST GO AND SEE CIRIN...
IN THE DISTANCE, A FORM BEGINS TO RISE AT THE EPICENTRE OF THE MASSIVE, HEAVING, WRENCHING CONVULSION...
FLESH
SPIRIT
FLESH
SPIRIT
FLESH
FLESH
SPIRIT
SPIRIT
FLESH
HI...
I AM BLOSSOM

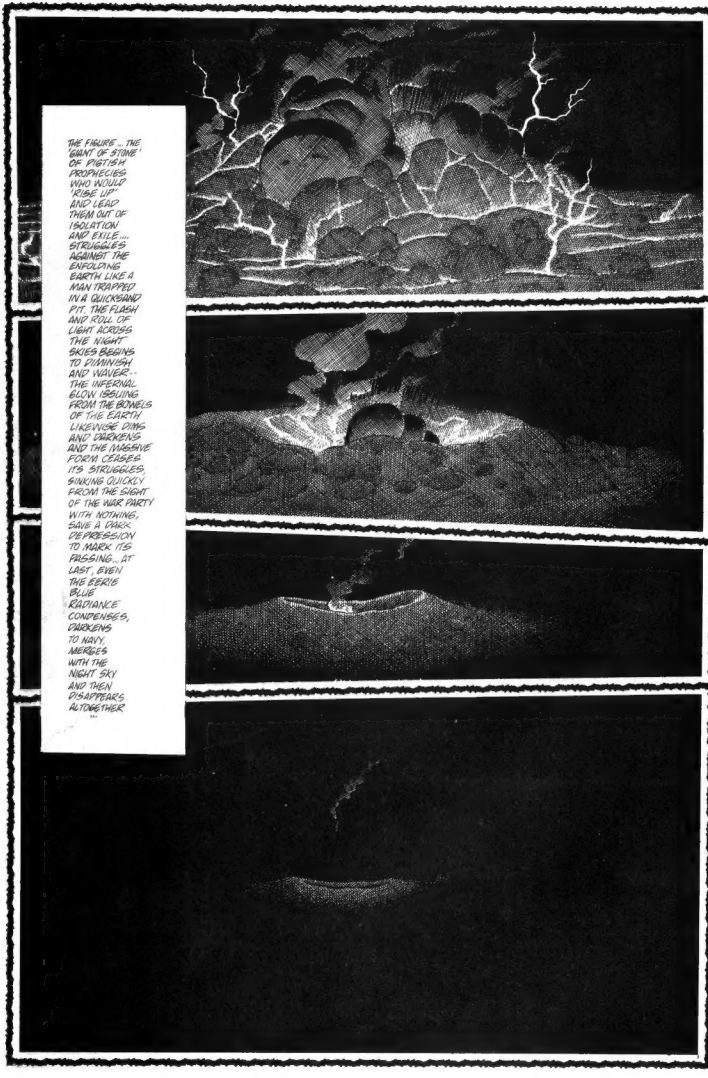

TONS OF EARTH ARE DISPLACED, RISING, CRUMBLING, HURLED SKYWARD. THE SURROUNDING AIR THINS RAPIDLY, BECOMING HOT AND STIFLING...
SO--YOU HAVE TO TAKE OFF WHOLE LEOTARD WHEN NATURE CALLS?
HUH?
UH NO--THE TONBUE DESIGN HAS CONCEALED SNAP FASTENERS HOLDING IT ON...

Oohhhh...
"SNAP FASTENERS"
YOU VERY CLEVER FELLOW, YES?
SNAP SNAP SNAP
A GIANT HAND EMERGES AS THE SWELLING MOUND OF EARTH RISES HIGHER AND STILL HIGHER...
PUFF PUFF PUFF

KNOCK KNOCK
GREAT CIKING!
YOU'VE BEEN SMOKING AGAIN...
MMM
YOU VERY BIG MAN
VERY STRONG
MMMMMM...
FEEL GOOD.
FEEL NICE.
PART OF MY ADAMANTIUM SKELETON...
GETTING HARDER STRONGER
CHANGING CHANGING INTO...

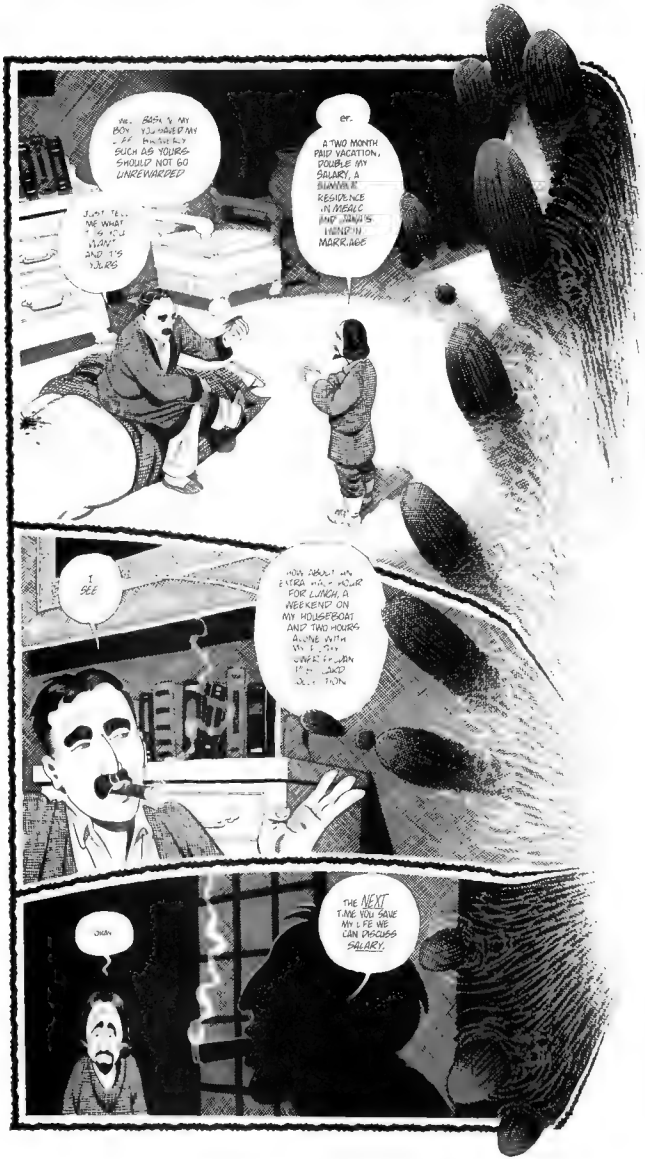
OH!
OH!
OH!
OH!
OH!
OH!
OH!
TO--
OH!
GHOST ROACH
PUT VERY SIMPLY...
THE DIMENSIONS HAVE CHANGED... THE SPHERE IS NOW...
FORTY-SIX METERS ACROSS...
I KNOW GREAT CIRIN--
NO, THERE IS NO RATIONAL EXPLANATION
MR. HAMMOND ALSO INFORMS ME THAT SEVERAL TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES HAVE APPARENTLY
RESOLVED THEMSELVES.
AGAIN
NO RATIONAL EXPLANATION

CORNERED? LORD JULIUS WITH NO PLACE TO RUN...
WHERE ARE YOUR BRAVE WITTICISMS NOW, EH?
FUNNY YOU SHOULD MENTION MY BRAVE WITTICISMS...
OWING TO THEIR REDUCED CIRCUMSTANCES THEY'VE OPTED FOR AN EARLY RETIREMENT TO A COZY LITTLE PROPERTY IN MY LOWER PELVIC REGION...
SPUT
FIZZ
SPUT
MMMMM


THE FIGURE... THE 'GIANT OF STONE' OF PICTISH PROPHECIES WHO WOULD 'RISE UP' AND LEAD THEM OUT OF ISOLATION AND EXILE... STRUGGLES AGAINST THE ENFOLDING EARTH LIKE A MAN TRAPPED IN A QUICKSAND PIT. THE FLASH AND ROLL OF LIGHT ACROSS THE NIGHT SKIES BEGINS TO DIMINISH AND WAVER... THE INFERNAL GLOW ISSUING FROM THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH LIKEWISE DIMS AND DARKENS AND THE MASSIVE FORM CEASES ITS STRUGGLES, SINKING QUICKLY FROM THE SIGHT OF THE WAR PARTY WITH NOTHING, SAVE A DARK DEPRESSION TO MARK ITS PASSING... AT LAST, EVEN THE EERIE BLUE RADIANCE CONDENSES, DARKENS TO NAVY, MERGES WITH THE NIGHT SKY AND THEN DISAPPEARS ALTOGETHER.

TUNG
CHK
I'VE
I'VE NEVER SHOT A WOMAN BEFORE
WELL LET'S SAVE IT FOR THE AUTOPSY
YOUR RECORD MIGHT BE INTACT
GREAT CHRIN
I'VE DONE A GOOD DEAL OF THINKING ON THIS AND...
THANK YOU MRS. THATCHER THAT WILL BE ALL
SO... AH SAY.
SO HOW FAR YOUR
"TEST" GO SON
AT... LONG... LONG... LAST.
I... I HAVE FOUND
MY QUEEN

WHOA THAR, SON--
QUEEN!?
BUT- BUT BUT
SHE'S A--
A CLINICIAN-- YES-- I KNOW
A HUMBLE ORIGIN FOR SO MAJOR A CHARACTER TO BE SURE
EVEN SO..
THIS IS A CROSS OVER- A TEAM-UP THAT'S BEEN WRITTEN IN THE STARS SINCE TIME BEGAN...
A MUST-HAVE DOUBLE EGG MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN, OLD CHUM..
A HOT FIRST APPEARANCE WITH SOLID LONG TERM INVESTMENT POTENTIA...
BUT ET ...
SHE'S UP SHE'S
NOT EXACTLY IN MINT CONDITION, SON
IF YOU FOLLOW MAH MEANING
THERE'S A FEW CREASES ON HER SPINE SURE- MINOR WEAR A LITTLE FADING..
BUT THERE'S NO FLAKING NO PIECES MISSING.
SHE'S FINE.. VERY FINE.
AND WITH MY LOVE AND TIME AND PATIENCE
SHE CAN BE RESTORED OLD FRIEND
SHE CAN BE PRISTINE ONCE MORE


MR. BASH'N, MY BOY, YOU HAVE MY HEARTFELT PRAISE FOR SUCH AS YOURS SHOULD NOT GO UNREWARDED
JUST TELL ME WHAT IT IS YOU WANT AND IT'S YOURS
er.
A TWO MONTH PAID VACATION, DOUBLE MY SALARY, A SWANKY RESIDENCE IN BEVERLY HILLS AND JANE'S HAND IN MARRIAGE
I SEE
HOW ABOUT AN EXTRA HALF HOUR FOR LUNCH, A WEEKEND ON MY HOUSEBOAT AND TWO HOURS ALONE WITH MY I-TEN-SIFIER IN WHICH TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION
JEEVES
THE NEXT TIME YOU SAVE MY LIFE WE CAN DISCUSS SALARY.

POW!

Last Waltz

Having read Gary Groth's Editorial (faxed to me, appropriately enough, by Brian Hibbs) in the *Comics Journal* #152, I am boggled, as I have been for some time, by the extent to which Gary is ignorant of the field he purports to document. Gary reminds one very much of those scientists who begin with a conclusion and then seek out evidence to support it.

Gary's conclusion, from which commence all his opinions, is that if everyone wrote, drew, published, distributed and read only those comic books that Gary Groth deems worthy (a short list consisting of the Fantagraphics catalogue and a handful of other titles to ward off any suggestion of navel-gazing as an absolute), that it would bring about an artistic renaissance in the field, everyone accumulating extra IQ points by the bucketsful, a sensitivity to, and awareness of the human condition would blossom forth. Art critics in the employ of the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Art Forum* et al would note the shining beacon of intellectual insight writ large glowing preternaturally over the northwest coast of the United States, and an epiphany of staggering proportions would strike, surely and universally, at the very core of their collective awareness. To wit; Gary Groth is Right! About Everything! All that he deems to be Without Merit is Verily! Without Merit! All that he deems Meritorious is Verily! Meritorious! Their opinions would then march in lock-step with his own. Zigging when Gary is disposed to zig; zagging when Gary is in the mood for a good zag. A single universal Grothian mass mind of excellence, calibrated precisely; the measure of all things and beings in the world of graphic narrative; raising up this year's Icon to the dizzying heights of Grothian approval, only to dash him on the ignominous rocks of Grothian disfavour a few months hence (Gary was right when he raised him up and Gary was right when he cast him down from the face of Fantagraphics heaven. Gary moves in mysterious ways).

I remember talking to Gary early this year on the phone just before the start of the Tour, discussing with him the approach I intended to take in discussions with retailers; advocating that the term Independent comics was no longer functional and that a better choice would be Alternative comics. My argument runs along the lines that Dark Horse's *Aliens* comics could scarcely be described as alternative to anything, in the sense that a good comic book; the best comic books provide an alternative to the mind-numbing sameness of network television, best-seller novels, almost all movies, as well as providing an alternative to standard super-hero comic books. The second step of the argument (I knew Gary was "with me" on the first part as he has belaboured the point in more square footage of tiny type than any other person in history) was that with a classification based on "Alternativeness" (to coin a word), even a comic book published by DC, *Sandman* would qualify as just such a . . .

"Is that any good?" he interupted.

Certain that I had misheard or misunderstood, I asked him, was what any good?

"Sandman. Is it any good?"

How is one to answer? Does one laugh? Does one cry?

Is Sandman any good?

Even as I type my recollection of the conversation, I am at a loss as to where to go from here. When someone asks me at a stop on the Tour why I'm doing three hundred issues of a comic book, it is a matter of stringing a few sentences together to assist in perception; illustrating to them how the world looks through my eyes, not so that they will necessarily share that vision, but so they can at least understand.

However.

When someone has carved himself a niche in the world of comics journalism; aspires to raise the quality of that journalism and purports to be the foremost spokesman for an emergent medium. When someone invests time and energy and money and all of his considerable intellectual powers to initiate, provoke and mold the debate on the merits and demerits of the comic book medium.

Is Sandman any good.

Gary is isolated.

When I think about him, the isolation is the first thing that leaps to mind. Gary calling Steve Bissette on Christmas Eve to complain about some set-to that he and I were having; about my faxing my side of the argument to Bissette before Gary Himself had had a chance to see it. Does one laugh? Does one cry? Steve sputters something along the lines of "It's Christmas Eve, Gary" and laughs. I could picture Gary's furrowed brow. What on earth does the celebration of a pagan festival usurped by the Catholic Church have to do with a perceived violation of implicit protocol governing a forensic debate?

Isolation is characteristic of any figure in a supervisory position within (and most especially at the summit of) a bureaucracy. Peter Bagge's Fanboygraphix Island is as accurate a portrait as you could hope to find of Gary Groth and Kim Thompson. The two bound together in their isolation, trudging dutifully around the same rhetorical cul de sac, month after month, year after year. The only thing that sells is shit. We publish quality. That's why our books don't sell. Store owners are stupid. Fans are Stupid. Distributors are stupid. Stupid people don't know quality when they see it. That's why our books don't sell. Todd MacFarlane made a million dollars. That's why our books don't sell. Everyone's buying bat-shit. That's why our books don't sell.

Capitalism is corrupt and has infected every area of society. That's why our books don't sell

Brian Hibbs got into the habit of sending me letters about two years ago. He had opened *Comix Experience*, (he said) largely because of me; conversing into the wee small hours of the Aardvarks Over San Diego party in 1986. He was "just a fan", but there he was listening to me, listening to the other creative people at the party, debating, discussing, trading information and opinions. He decided at that point that he was going to devote his life to comic books.

Cool.

I was isolated two years ago. Bruised and raw from the Diamond fight of 1988, I had retreated from the comic book field and stood sneering from the sidelines. Brian wanted me to come out and do a signing. I brushed him off. A waste of time, I said. I work on the book and that's it. If the quality of the work doesn't sell it, then we'll just have to go slowly out of business, go strictly to mail order, whatever; we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Brian answered thoughtfully, outlining where I could do things to help circulation, stuff that worked in his store, stuff that didn't cost an arm and a leg and which was proven to be effective for DC and Marvel. We went around the circle a few times; me holding fast to the opinion that nothing made any difference and if he wanted to invest all his money in stupid super-hero comics and jump into bed with DC and Marvel on co-op advertising and promotion and things of that kind, well, more power to him.

It wasn't until Brian took his case to the pages of Blood & Thunder, the *Comics Journal* letters page that I began to see his arguments differently. It was a chilling experience to see my own counter-arguments being put forward by Gary Groth. The crowning moment came when Gary (answering Brian's charge that without promotional material, it is almost impossible for a store-owner to turn someone onto any comic series) stated that they had done a *Love & Rockets* poster last year and almost none of the stores had gotten them who wanted them anyway, so why bother. It was then that I knew Brian was right and I knew how frustrating the whole debate had become for him. He had an irrefutable argument and all he could get in answer were non sequiturs. The Tour and all of the promotion attached to it were the direct result. Now (no surprise to Brian) our orders are going up.

The danger of the kind of isolation that I went through and the kind of isolation which is Gary's stock-in-trade is that it effectively neutralizes any chance of building our small corner of the marketplace. Part of me would recommend that Gary get out and actually *meet* some retailers, *ask* them questions and then *listen* to their answers. Another part of me knows that Gary's basic nature would make that an exercise in futility. Whatever he hears goes in one ear and out the other unless it conforms to his preconceived notion that Fantagraphics has a monopoly on quality and that quality doesn't sell. He is unable to connect with the comics environment and the books he publishes suffer for that very reason. He accuses me of peddling my ass, nakedly, to the retailers, for such is his view of cooperation. Larry Marder, by taking a leave of absence from *Beanworld* to function as Gary Colabuono's right hand man at the Moondog's chain has managed to push up sales on Fantagraphics material by as much as one thousand per cent. And yet, one suspects that when the day comes for Larry Marder to be subjected to the notorious Groth scrutiny, he will be judged and found wanting as an artist, presumably because he is not huddled in an unheated garret, wringing his hands and trusting in Gary Groth's wisdom that the reason he is starving slowly is that he is brilliant and talented. It is his fate, nay, his obligation to be wretched and to remain distanced from the people selling his work and consequently his book can't and won't sell enough copies to provide him with a decent living. His declining sales are a badge of honour to be worn proudly.

In the "us and them" Fantagraphics world, the energies of its Chief Executive Officer are expended largely in the noisy venting of his not inconsiderable spleen. It's Todd MacFarlane's fault. It's Terry Stewart's fault. It's Steve Geppi's fault.

In the Diamond speech, I identified a self-evident fact of the marketplace; the engine which drives it is the ability to sell comic books purchased by the retailer for less than a dollar for twenty, thirty dollars and more in a very short time frame. Where do you think your money comes from, Gary? What do you suppose composes the infrastructure of the comics environment? Every four months, an issue of *Love & Rockets* comes out and suddenly Diamond Comics is solvent? Man, that was close. We were teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, but now we're okay for another four months. Gary continues to try to manufacture a reality where he is at the top of a pyramid; where he represents something. What he represents is a short-sighted self-absorbed view of his own ever-diminishing world. He deplores the commerce that provides him with a livelihood and provides revenues for the artists in his employ. He is not interested in how things are, he is interested only in how things ought to be. Fantagraphics creators are to be provided with a living wage irrespective of their productivity. In a recent issue of *Love & Rockets*, Gary dead-panned that Los Bros. could produce more issues a year (I think he even said monthly) if their circulation went up. Along the same lines, he offered to stop publishing pornography if everyone sent him twenty-five dollars. It is implicit (and at times explicit) in Gary's writing that the comic book world owes a living to him and to anyone he has signed to a contract. The cul de sac grows ever smaller and is gradually leeched of anything resembling sanity. I know who the best cartoonists are because only the best cartoonists work for me and everyone should buy tens of thousands of copies of their work. Why? Because they're the best cartoonists. Why? Because they work for me and only the best cartoonists work for me.

Ask any retailer and he will tell you that the thing that most hurts the sales on any book is being off-schedule. I didn't know this before the Tour. I, like Gary, was from the "Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for waiting" school of publishing. When the retailers say this, they are not capriciously demanding that creators and publishers should be subservient to them. They are identifying a fact of life. If it's late and if it's consistently late, it's going to hurt the sales. There is a core audience for each book who will wait for it 'til hell freezes over. The rest of the audience is made up of people who will eventually move onto other books if the one they're looking for doesn't show up for a few months. This is reality and there is no question in my mind that, as such, it needs to be as widely disseminated as possible. If Gary and the creators working for him choose to ignore this central fact and to sneer derisively at those who are on schedule and who take their scheduling seriously, that is certainly their right; but it would be much appreciated if they could spare us all the whining and complaining about the deck being stacked against them.

Perhaps more than anything else, it is Gary's refusal or inability to see the interconnectedness of all elements in the comic book field that is the most annoying trait in his journalism. If I am addressing a room full of comics retailers, as I did in Baltimore, I am speaking from my own vantage point as a writer/artist/publisher. If I want them to change the way that they do business, I am going to have to understand how their businesses operate. Far from a blanket advocacy of Independents, which was how many misinterpreted the speech, I was beginning with their own fact that a book that ships late is a tough sell, and recommending that instead of simply deploring all of the late books, that they look at who in

the field has a proven track record for reliability over the long term with no sign of wavering in the foreseeable future. I used as an example, *Groo* which is published by Marvel, *Usagi Yojimbo* which is published by (surprise!) Fantagraphics and *Cerebus*. I could've added *Sandman* which is published by DC. I was (and am) attempting to find common ground as a creator-publisher with retailers. I could've said Cerebus got rave reviews in *Rolling Stone*, the *Atlantic*, *Village Voice*, etc., etc., and if you don't double your order tomorrow, you're a narrow-minded, low-brow half-witted Marvel Zombie. This has been Gary Groth's approach for some years now and I find it truly remarkable that someone who is himself a businessman (certainly to a far greater extent than I am a businessman if size of bureaucracy is any measure) finds himself completely unable to understand the needs and requirements of other businessmen Occasionally in business, it becomes necessary to administer a cautionary bit of dental pressure, but Gary persists not only in biting the hand that feeds him, but in severing it at the elbow and then whining when he goes hungry (or rather when his *creators* go hungry; Gary has always been reasonably well-fed through good times and bad, hasn't he?).

The rise of Image comics troubles Gary deeply. He is more deeply troubled by the rise of self-publishing of which Image is only the most lucrative manifestation. Image signals a rapid shift of control of the comics industry away from the business people and towards the creative community. With Image, the publisher is a mere functionary; a paper-shuffler, bookkeeper, traffic manager. The very thought that one day Peter Bagge, Los Bros and Dan Clowes might one day decide to rent a one room office, installing a secretary and a telephone at minimal joint cost, thereby instantly depriving Gary of platform, raison d'etre, livelihood and status in one fell swoop must keep him awake nights.

What is Fantagraphics without *Hate*, without *Eightball*, without *Love & Rockets*? Indeed, what is Gary Groth without the credibility-by-association that those creators and those books confer upon him? As I skim through his diatribe, every phrase seems to have nothing in common with reality as any sensible person would define the term. "Most artists do not want to be straight-jacketed with a fan favourite character, but prefer to work like most novelists creating new stories and characters to suit their needs". Who then, is Young Dan Pussey? Buddy Bradley? Stinky? Maggie and Hopey? Usagi Yojimbo?

Wizard magazine and the Image creators in tandem have increased the profitability of comic books as collectors items; it is an enormous and largely unexpected windfall for the comic book stores and their owners. Those who take the profits simply for personal gain will at least ensure that their stores stay in business. If (as is usually the case) they only order *Cerebus* or Fantagraphics Books to fill subscription orders, that guarantees that those orders will still be there next year and the year after. For those stores that use the profits to expand the alternative side of their business, that money can do great things for *Cerebus*, for *Usagi Yojimbo*, and for everyone else who upholds their half of the "bargain"; delivering the promised creativity in a timely fashion. A lot of people who buy *Cerebus* and get hooked on it become curious about other material outside the mainstream. A *Cerebus* fan who comes into a comic store every month in search of the latest issue will be more apt to stumble across a Fantagraphics book (or several of them) which ships on an irregular schedule. This doesn't happen infrequently, from what the many retailers I've met in the last seven months have told me. The retailers are not demanding that everyone switch to a monthly frequency. What they are saying is that if you say you publish three times a year, then you should come out three times a year. If you say the book is going to ship in April, then the book should ship in April. No reasonable human being would disagree with this.

Store owners, managers, employees work usually five and sometimes seven days a week. I met a retailer at the Diamond warehouse in Boston who gets up every Thursday at 4:00 a.m. in New Hampshire and drives four hours to Boston to pick up his books so he can have them on sale when the store opens Thursday morning. That is dedication. In my speech, I was advocating that they look around and see where they find a comparable dedication in the creative and publishing communities. If a creator is working eight hours a day, five days a week and can only produce two issues a year, I don't think anyone could fault him for that. I certainly couldn't. But one would hope, in the interests of cooperation, in the interests of the betterment of the comic book environment, and in his own self-interest, that that creator would say, definitively, that his book comes out in June and December come hell or high water so that the retailer who is the vital link between him and his audience can have a reliable answer to the question that sets every retailer's molars grinding from Alaska to Florida, "when's the next issue coming out?"

Gary Groth is the last of a dying breed that I am not sorry to see vanishing from this Earth; the publisher as super-star. The single-minded champion of quality in comics who stands opposed to all other publishers, all other creators; an adversary locked in mortal combat with all levels of the retail community and with everyone who holds a view different from his own. It does not take a person of monumental insight to read between the lines of Gary's opinions and see his view of himself. He longs for the day when the *Village Voice* or *Rolling Stone* will do a serious piece on him. He will get goose-flesh when he sees the adjective "embattled". He will suckle at "courageous", rub his cheek along the syllables of "visionary". Only someone like Gary, devoid as he is of any sense of irony could cling to such a self-image while publishing Eros comics.

The world of comics is passing Gary by and has been for some time. New alliances are being struck and the inevitable shift of large forces is making him redundant. Larry Marder's work at *Moondog's* forges new ties between retailer and creator. Peter Laird's *Xenc Foundation* sidesteps, neatly, the Fantagraphics-like quagmire in which Tundra finds itself. Image comics shows that creators don't need the benediction or approval of distributors, publishers, editors or the *Comics Journal*. They produce their work for their audience, for themselves and for each other; they ignore the clucking tongues of the traditionalists and the sneering of the cynics and are content.

Steve Bissette informs me that the previous issue of the *Journal* contained a plea for letters of comment.

Poor Gary.

There he sits in his leather apron and industrial gloves, all his knives and cleavers and scalpels honed to razor sharpness and no one wants to play in his abatoir any more. He is the serial killer without victims. A concentration camp guard with no prisoners. A boxer waiting patiently, a little punchy around the edges, for an opponent who will, in all likelihood, never arrive; the remnants of the once-large crowd melting away row by row, section by section. Many of them are a little sad, many more are embarrassed on his behalf but, still, they are eager for the daylight and some fresh air.

He turns slowly in my direction. I am the last of the ringside spectators not directly employed by him; not dependant on him for my livelihood.

Is Sandman any good?

All I can do is stare at him. No answer comes to mind. No answer is possible.

Is Sandman any good?

I rise from my seat, stifling a yawn; and I begin the long, slow climb to daylight and fresh air.

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave,

I'm really glad I had the opportunity to meet and talk with you at the recent Diamond show in Baltimore. You and your fellow self-publishers, Martin Wagner and Colleen Doran, were among the most interesting comic professionals I met out there. Since my return from Baltimore I have had the opportunity to communicate with both Martin and Colleen concerning their respective projects, now it's your turn.

In the letter column to #159 you write of a life and death struggle between quality comics material and all the other shit. You weren't exaggerating in the least. I should know because, as a retailer, I'm right on the front lines of this battle every day. Every day I see people coming in looking for the latest glow-in-the-dark, poly-bagged, or hologram covered piece of garbage comic. Why? Because they believe it to be a "hot" book. "Hot", in the context of their minds, means it will be worth a lot of money. I think we both know the absurdity of that type of thinking. Comics, to this type of speculator, are junk bonds and a lot of people get burned with junk bonds (Yes, I know I'm paraphrasing you; but you're right, dammit).

As a retailer I have to serve the various tastes of my patrons. If a person genuinely enjoys a mainstream comic, then more power to them. In the 3-1/2 years I have been a humble comics seller I have been able to diversify and expand the comic horizons of many of my customers. People who were reading X-Men and Punisher are now reading *Sandman, Bone, Cry For Dawn, Cerebus,* and many other interesting works. Many people are open to quality comics, you just have to work like hell to get them to give the good stuff a try. My thing is that I want my people to be reading and enjoying the comics they buy. I would much rather be talking to a customer about the storyline of a comic than its potential as a "collector's item." I'm not an investment counselor, I'm a comic book retailer.

Recently, I've been on a real quality kick. I've been able to introduce many of my patrons to Colleen Doran's *A Distant Soil*, mostly through sheer force of will and personal suggestion. I'm looking forward to working with Martin Wagner on increasing *Hepcats* readership among my customers. I've been getting a lot of calls about *Cerebus* lately, probably as a result of the publicity generated by your tour. If they want *Cerebus*, then *Cerebus* is what they shall have. Ignorant speculators and closed minded Marvel zombies also inhabit the hallowed halls of Acme, but they too are being challenged to expand their horizons. I may not get them to expand, but they won't get me to quit trying. I believe it's important to try. Too many of my fellow retailers just don't give a damn. This is too bad, mainly because their patrons are suffering as a result of their apathy. The mainstream superhero stuff is a part, not the totality, of what comics are about. The hard part is getting the customer to realize this. I'm trying and will continue to try. Thanks for listening.

Sincerely,

Conrad L. Stinnett III
Acme Books, Comics, and Collectibles
1241 W. Main, Peoria, Ill.
USA 61606

The *next* bit evolution I'm looking forward to is the first few comic book stores that don't carry Marvel and DC (except titles like Hellblazer, Sandman, etc.). Comic stores in 1980 only had a hundred titles available to them; why not pick the best one hundred titles currently available and run a pure quality store? I know, I know; I still think it's a completely realistic goal.

Dear Dave and Ger,

Hey guys, just writing to comment on a couple things. *Cerebus* has continually amazed and confused me. I recently bought the telephone book reprint issues and I look forward to having my confusion cleared up. I've collected for two years and plan to stay with you to the end.

More importantly though, I've wanted to tell you a story for almost a year and a half; I'll do it now. I was fifteen and was taking a pre-calculus course. Our class had an old teacher with a slow, deep, nasal voice. The kind of guy who thinks ankles are attractive. His lectures sounded like a drawn out bassoon solo in a Tracy Chapman song. More people slept than listened. One day (a Friday, I think, we were all particularly antsy) I brought an issue of *Cerebus* with me. It was issue number 139, where a more than slightly agitated Roach is harassed by his waitress. While reading, I couldn't stop laughing. At one point, I put my fingers up against my temples and whispered "cunty, cunty, FUHhh . . ." The guy sitting next to me, whom I apparently woke up with my outburst, asked to read my comic. He practically cried with laughter. My teary eyed classmate passed the comic on to the next person, and then the next person. By the end of the period, everyone had read it. While half the class strained to contain their laughter, the other half claimed they "didn't get it." My teacher took the issue away, calling it a disturbance (He read it too, I don't thing he "got it") but I got it back.

I just wanted to thank you on behalf of the delighted half of the class. They are potential *Cerebus* regulars. Unfortunately, I don't think any of them actually started buying. *Cerebus* is just too hard to find, too hard to understand, and rather expensive. It takes serious commitment to stick with it. But I guess that's what the tour's about: getting *Cerebus* into the hands of more people.

I'd also like to take this time to tell you about my comic store. Every Friday afternoon for the last nine years I've gone to Capital City Comics. The owner, Bruce Ayres, and his undeniably hip employees of past and present (hi! Dave, Tom, Brian and Jamie) have continually introduced me to new comics, including *Cerebus*. If it wasn't for them, I would still be reading G.I. Joe (the *real*

American hero). They deserve congratulations, and I hope you'll come down to visit us in Madison.

One other thing, people have recently written in expressing gratitude that you've returned to the letters pages. As much as I love ya' Dave, I preferred it with no responses. It felt more open.

Anyway, I'll write you again soon.

Keep up the good work guys.

Charlie Reznikoff
3930 Manitou Way
Madison, WI
USA 53711

You got it back? Man, things sure have changed since I was in high school. If a teacher would've caught me with a comic book with the words "fucking cunts" in it, I would've been in Kingston Penitentiary for a few decades.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

First off, let me congratulate you, on the sustained and continued superlative work on *Cerebus*. At the beginning of 1982 or thereabouts, Aardvark-Vanaheim was foremost amongst alternate publishers, in rekindling my interest in comics. The furry aardvark was then, and still is, a rarity in the comics industry. One that is intelligent, intriguing, satirical, and bitingly humorous. Your writing and Gerhard's backgrounds only accentuate an already polished and stylised artwork. Due to *Cerebus*, I have acquired, no, actually heightened a strong bias towards both Marvel and DC, and non-creator owned comics. Through *Cerebus*, I've come to respect the single vision of the craftsman rather than the disjointed vision of the factory assembly line.

It's not my intention of enlarging the chorus lamenting the evident and flagrant shortcomings of comics, rather mine, is to celebrate the solitary beacon in the darkness, that is *Cerebus*. I'll admit that I evolve at the periphery of mainstream comics, that is, I'm a strong proponent of *quality* alternates. France and Japan have demonstrated that comics needn't be constrained to one genre but, are in fact limitless in scope. They have also dispelled the prevailing attitude that comics are the preserve of pre-pubescent adolescents or semi-literate poltroons. Globally, North American comics aren't inherently inferior products counter to the Japanese manga or French bandes dessiné, rather they've been demarcated in a genre that has been nearly exhausted and offers little or no room for artistic or creative development.

As a major force for creator's rights, Dave, I dearly want you to elaborate upon your opinions of Image Comics. I glimpsed some of your evaluations in your responses to readers in #159's Aardvark comment, such as, Valiant and Image being Marvel clones and that the writing on the initial release of Youngblood having the deleterious effect of reducing comics' average readership age below that of ten. On these aspects, I agree with you wholeheartedly, nonetheless, you have to agree that Image is a small but significant victory for the creator's rights movement. Albeit, Image creators haven't altogether severed their umbilical cords to the Marvel/DC paradigm, they do provide the fertile environment for potentially innovative and experimental work. Before departing, isn't it alarming, the way that Rob Liefeld is rapidly spinning off Youngblood into new titles, almost like, dare I say it, the might Marvel conglomerate?

Yours Sincerely,

Jean-Philippe Marc
136 rue Pérodeau
Longueuil, Quebec
Canada J4L 1E2

The bottom line on Image Comics is that it represents a dramatic shift in the control of the comics industry out of the hands of business people and into the hands of creative people. I understand that there is a schism within Image already between the creators who want it to remain a loosely-knit coalition of creators and those who want it to be another Engulf and Devour-style corporation. I guess you know which side I'm rooting for.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave Sim,

Thanks for letting me interview you for our newspaper up here in St. Joe, Mo. I've enclosed the clipping.

The information in it is pretty general, but I wrote it to introduce folks to what I think is one of the most interesting writing (and drawing) projects going on in North America, so I tried to be gentle. In the newsroom, at least, it's inspired several of my fellow writers to take a look at your comic.

You'll be happy to know they laughed.

I'm sorry the story went to print before your photographs arrived, but an opportunity to run the article opened up, so I took it rather than waiting and risking the story falling into the hands of another (and perhaps censorious) editor. I can just hear him saying something like, "Well, I just don't think this is the sort of thing we want in a general-interest family newspaper . . ."

At any rate, it was great to meet you in Kansas City, and thanks for signing all my original pages. They're hanging in my home now and they almost always elicit favorable comments from my friends — or at least they elicit gratifying looks of puzzlement: "You actually read this stuff?"

"Hey," I say, "I actually learn things from this stuff."

Thanks again,

Preston Filbert

Thank *you* for the great article. With all the money and time and energy we're spending on PR, it's always gratifying when a Cerebus fan, on his own initiative, helps us out. Thanks again.

★★★★★★★★★★

Hi Guys!

So there I was in a ballroom of the Miami Park Plaza Hotel, clutching my very own sketch of Cerebus-as-tax-collector and signed #44 (Best Wishes to Christi in Miami, PsssSSSSSSSssss), feeling all warm and squishy inside because Dave reMEMbered me from a letter I wrote ages ago (and he never printed, hint hint.) I was trying to say something inane about Cirnnism to the fan between me and the pages of #158 hoping he would get bored and get out of my way so I could look at the work in progress . . . something about how I don't think it's right that only women should have the right to handle currency. Gerhard looked up from the background he was sketching and said something to the effect that men haven't done such a good job at it. I stood there tingling in delight for a minute because Gerhard and I Share An Opinion. (I was also still in shock to discover that Gerhard has a voice.)

Had I been acting less the female version of a fanboy and had my

wits about me, I would have said, "Yes, Gerhard, you certainly hit that nail right on the head. However, do you think women having exclusive control of currency would be much of an improvement?" Because I think each gender has its own agenda, as it were, and neither of these agendae necessarily coincide with the best overall agenda for the human race as a whole, which is probably best served by a government comprised of an amalgamation of men and women of every conceivable opinion and adult attitudes about getting their way.

Every conversation goes perfectly in hindsight. Oh well, it was a joy and a delight meeting you both, and I hope you all got to eat something SOMEtime that day and that the rest of the tour is going well.

No, I won't quit reading *Cerebus* irrespective of what he does for two pages in future issues.

Thanks for the sketches!

Blessed be,

Christi Morgret
1723 Lee Street, #1
Hollywood, FL
USA 33020

P.S. I'm not listening to anything right now, because when I listen to music, that's all I do. When I read *Cerebus*, that's all I do, too. Some of your "You've GOT to try XYZ band no one but me has ever heard of as background music to the mag" readers ought to try blessed silence for a change.

P.P.S. Anyone who wants to can write.

Thanks for saying nice things about Cerebus to the XS reporter. The fact that I had a female fan gave me instant credibility with her during the interview.

Tall red-head, guys. If I was the sleazy womaniser I'm reputed to be, I would've gone after her. Get those stamps and envelopes out.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Here's the (very) short Joanna Russ story I told you about. I saw you, quite by accident (the Twinkies game had just ended and I was flipping channels), with Bobby Wilde of KDWB-FM on TV. Between him and "Oscar" Cochran, maybe KDWB is onto something. Too bad they play such shitty music. Oh well.

Anyway, thanks for coming out here and for allowing me to tag along with you and Laura. I'll write again but now I have to go to school.

Love

Tony Dunlop
3447 Grand Ave.
Minneapolis, MN
USA 55408

What a great story; and right in the middle of working on the chess game issues! *Mr. Wilde's Second Chance* is now one of my all time favourites. See you next time I'm in town, Tony.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Here are all 3 issues of BIFF BANG POW! I can't remember if I sent you #2, so I'm just going to send 2 copies of each issue (share with Gerhard). Number 3 is hot off the presses.

This comic is doing terrible! I have had so many problems with Capital City and Diamond, I'm just about ready to chuck the whole comics mess! Both distributors have done basically nothing to get our books out there. They haven't even been able to ship them to the stores that bought them! No wonder the orders just get lower and lower. I do OK in Chicago only because I drive to any store that wants these books. People have told me that the book is nowhere to be found in New York or LA, even at the shops that order everything! I know a lot of Chicago shops never got their orders. The distributors paid me at least, but it would be nice if they actually **distributed** the stuff!

Self-publishing is very frustrating and there have been few rewards so far . . . plus I lost a lot of money. I was hoping I could at least pay the contributors, but oh well. We all knew this was a big risk, but the response from the industry has been disappointing. We are getting no help from shops or distributors at all. Obviously, small companies like ours are just a big pain in the ass, and they'd rather not bother returning our calls. It's very frustrating to not be even given the slightest chance . . .

I wouldn't mind all this if I knew that people (i.e., comics shoppers) were getting a chance to see this book, though. Pfeh.

Well, enough complaining. Do you think we could get a plug in *Cerebus*? If you enjoyed these comic books, it would really help us out a lot if you let your readers know. We have a new address (see below) and one can get all 3 issues for $10.00 (postage included). Or individual issues for $3.50 each. Thanks.

If you'll be at the Chicago Comics Convention, I will see you there. I've reserved a table for Paisano Publishing to try to sell our books.

Well, that's all from me. Hope you like the comics!

Sincerely,

Ivan Brunetti
Paisano Publishing Company
5110 S. Hyde Park Blvd. #1
Chicago, IL
USA 60615

Consider yourself plugged. Issue three of a comic book is no time to get discouraged. No one said anything about Cerebus until issue thirteen was out and even today we are not exactly the center-piece of the comics industry in most people's eyes. Work with the people who *are* supporting you and expand your own network; it's your comic book and it's your responsibility to make it a success. Your contributors as well; the day is long gone when you can just write and draw material, put it out there and hope for the best.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Just writing to say thank you. I stopped in at the Minneapolis stop of your tour and picked up a deck of Diamondback Cards and you sketched Missy in my copy of *Cerebus Phone Book*. It was a pleasure to meet you and Gerhard. I hope things went well in Minneapolis, and that you will return sometime.

I have a question on the rules of Diamondback. Where does the hand of Priestess-Priestess fit in? I assume it's between Magician-Priestess and Priestess-King. But could you verify that.

Oh, and thank you for the opportunity to purchase original pages. I got my page framed with the cover of issue 156, the issue it was in.

Oh well, must be off. Just wanted to say thanks for your time and the sneek preview of the future issues in progress.

Until #300 . . .

Geoffrey Cuddy
3250 Pleasant Ave.
Minneapolis, MN, USA 55408

One last thing . . . you mentioned to someone in front of me a movie that had a character that the Judge was based on. I didn't hear what the title was and forgot about it til later, so what was the title and do you know when it came out? Until next time . . . be seeing you.

And if you're ever in the Twin Cities again you should check out Comicbook College were they have been supporting *Cerebus* since the day they opened (no offence to Dreamhaven).

Priestess-priestess is the second most valuable hand, after magician-priestess. Considering all my experiences with priestesses in the last few years, the hand's omission can rightly be viewed as a Freudian slip.

The movie in question is *Little Murders* (1971), adapted from the play by Jules Feiffer.

★★★★★★★★★★

There is a prevailing attitude in comics publishing today that is somewhat daunting to aspiring creators striving to break into the field: Independent Publishers are only stepping stones to the real publishers. (i.e., Marvel and DC) This isn't a problem if the creators' only lifetime goal is to write and/or draw "Bubbleman" or whomever. When it *does* become difficult is when said creator, upon having reached the "Big Time", all full of enthusiasm and energy and originality, is thrown onto the lower rungs of a caste system that pretty much buries all those creative ideas and energies with regards to anything original, until you've served your time. Then, if the workhorse has fulfilled the quota, they may be given a shot at one of the company's staple characters, an opportunity usually gauged by the creators' fan following and/or the attitude or direction of whomever is at the editorial helm.

This is only a loose scenario, but one point is clear: Be it paste-up, pencilling writing, editing, emptying the trash, or whatever, the time must be served. The product must be published, have some quantity of quality, and it must come out on time. And it you can't do it, by God, we'll get someone who *can*. And they will, because there are dozens of people, creative or otherwise, who are willing to put in the hours necessary to produce work appealing in one way or the other to the likes of Dick Giordano and Tom DeFalco.

On the other hand, smaller companies tend to give one a little more rope with the probationary period — just enough for hanging. Sure, they experiment more with style and substance, but tend to be more tolerant of walking temperaments with the backs of their hands nailed to their foreheads, which plays havoc with scheduling. Publishing is a business that *propagates* the artform, but if you don't produce the paper, the pushers have nothing to do. You also don't eat. It's not that frequency has anything to do with sales, but you have to consider, should you spend your buck on *Batman* and take your chances, of save it in hopes *Miracleman* will come out on schedule?

(An exception to much of this is Stan Sakai. He *never* misses deadlines, is often months *ahead* of schedule, and recently finished his one-thousandth page of *Usagi Yojimbo*.)

Granted, sometimes it's the fault of the publisher, which is an easy dilemma to solve. Publish your own stuff. It's not that hard. As a matter of fact, several *thousand* people have done it since 1983 alone. A potentially good situation, with the opportunity to put the effort into results guided completely by the creator/publisher hybrid. However, unless you have the resources . . . Ah.

I *knew* there was a reason publishers exist. Barring that, all that remains is dedication and discipline. Do the best work possible, and produce it often enough to establish a market. The only other choices are to take it to a mainstream publisher where your time and talent will be directed to something else anyway, or go to an independent, where you *both* take a risk. Or, as I said, you do it yourself. If you can't, because of temperament, or a tiring day job, or bad pen nibs, or the weather, or whatever, then apparently the motivation isn't enough. It's no small task to produce a marketable comic book on a regular basis, but it *can* be done.

Wendy and Richard Pini have been doing it on and off since 1977. And as for Dave Sim . . .

Well.

Sim (with trusty sidekick, Gerhard) has been sitting in his tower for years just laughing at the rest of us who think we actually *work* in the comics industry, and with good cause. Not only has he developed into one of the most prolific talents around, he also does it on a monthly basis, and this year passed the three-thousand page mark on his self-published series, *Cerebus*. He doesn't do trading cards, multiple covers, or holograms, and maintains that his publishing company exists only because *Cerebus needs* it to exist, so he doesn't do much company stuff. What he does do, consistently, is good comics, and he never lets us forget it, because he's always getting better. Sounds like a challenge to me.

All right, Dave.

You're on.

Beginning the first week of September, 1992, and continuing every month thereafter, North America's newest publisher of a *monthly* creator-owned comic book will be releasing *Starchild*, written, illustrated, and published by James A. Owen. The first story arc runs twelve issues, so I'm committed for at least a year to the monthly format although I've many more stories to tell, so it will by no means end there. This is an unlimited series, and will have only *one* first issue. Each issue will be standard sized, black and white with color covers. Issues will be 32 pages in length, the stories filling 24 to 32 pages, with an occasional sketchbook or works in progress feature. *Starchild* #1 will retail for $2.25 ($2.75 Canadian) and distributors will received the standard discount of 60% on all quantities ordered. All correspondence to the writer, artist, and publisher should be addressed to Taliesin Press, 1750 S. Alma School #119, Mesa, AZ 85210, telephone 602-820-8022.

Starchild, the chronicling of the life and times of the remarkable Higgins family, is not a typical comic book. There are no fistfights, no superpowers, no waycool code names, and most of the characters walk when they have to go somewhere. Their clothes get dirty, and I don't have any cool catchy slogans. Come to think of it, I'm not even sure I have a *villain*. I guess all I can hope is that what I do have is good comics *anyway*.

I think I do. And I intend to do it consistently.

Count on it.

See, Ivan? Like this guy.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

It was good seeing you in Kansas City, hope to see you here again before the end of the second half. Rick from Clint's called me this morning to let me know you were pleased with the Critic's Choice in The Times. I'm glad you liked it, I'm just sorry I didn't have room to do anything larger. I've been a *Cerebus* fan for a while (I started picking *Cerebus* up right after *High Society* ended, the issue with the "*Elf-Guest*" story). I was really surprised at the turn-out last Saturday, I didn't know that many people in Kansas City had even *heard* of *Cerebus*. It did my heart good.

Rick mentioned you were planning on sticking the CC into your press packet — I'd dig to get a copy if you do (I'd dig a copy even if you didn't). And, in the spirit of media-outlet-mutual-back-scratch-greed-headedness, it would really make my week if you had any of those "1st Half" posters left — you'd run out by the time I got to the table (and I blew off the Con the next day: I've developed an aversion to swarms of sweaty fan-boys and their overweight girlfriends dressed up as the Scarlet Witch). I don't want to come off like some "hey man I did you a favor and you owe me one" sleezebag — I get enough of that shit everyday at the paper to know how much it sucks (jerkoff local bands expecting a review just because they send you a demo tape).

To be honest, everyone here has all these promo posters for shitty alternative/punk/grunge bands all over the walls (if I see the phrase "the next Nirvana" again I'm going to bite through my tongue), and I'd really like to have something worthwhile on my wall (all I've got is a beat up Lou Reed *New York* poster). If this isn't cool, I'm more than willing to pay for it — like I said, I'm trying really hard to avoid the sleezebag-promo crap, I'll even pay for postage.

Anyway, enough of the begging. Should you make it back this way sometime let me know so that I can try and get something bigger, like an actual article, into the paper.

Take care,

David Leonard
1509 Westport Road
Kansas City, MO, USA 64111

Wall-space next to a Lou Reed New York poster. Man, you can't ask for better than that.

Dave,

Issue #158 was without a doubt the best single issue of this still-new story arc. If #158 is any indication, the rest of *Mothers & Daughters* should continue to amaze and delight like no other comic book tale out there.

Actually I haven't read it yet, but I trust you.

Best,

Michael Dobosz
29 Grove Street
Turners Falls, MA
USA 01376

Y'daffy bastid.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Last Sunday my friend Brian and I drove up to Kansas City to see you. We had been sitting around at the bakery that morning, shaking off the residue of Saturday night with some high-voltage coffee, when we started talking about the idea. Somehow, it seemed as though a few minutes in your presence might salvage the weekend, and so after returning to our respective homes to grab some road music, we soon found ourselves on the highway.

We had no problem finding the Overland Park Marriott. Unfortunately, when we walked in at about 4:15, we discovered that you had left fifteen minutes earlier. We did get to see some people wheel boxes of comics out to their cars, and we saw the name card for Gerhard, but that was about it. In case you're wondering, by the way, it takes five hours to drive from Tulsa, Oklahoma to Kansas City. Five pretty dull hours. Of course, you do get to drive through all those strangely-named towns in western Missouri: Milo, Horton, Arthur, Archie, Adrian, Sheldon, etc. But, in the end, it probably was not worth the trip.

Yes, I know it was my own damn fault for not calling ahead for the times you would be there. The risk of spontaneity, I suppose. I hope the appearance went well. Just a suggestion: out here in the midwest, where cities are further apart and people have trouble getting up early on weekends, you might want to schedule your appearances for a little later in the day. Any chance you'll be adding Dallas to the U.S. Tour? It's only another five hour drive away, and we're willing to try it again.

Anyway, I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoy your work. It was reading bits about you and Alan Moore in *The Village Voice* that led me back to comics after an eight-year absence, and I'm grateful. My only complaint about *Cerebus* is that it defies my attempts to describe it to other people. Which is true of most all of the best stuff, I suppose. Anything that qualifies as "high concept" is unlikely to hold one's attention for very long.

Thanks. Maybe I'll catch up with you down the road.

Best,

Bret Masterson

I'll be at Paper Heroes in Killeen (which is just a hoot 'n' a hollar from Dallas) December 11. Hope to see you then.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I have just read your account of the St. Louis leg of your tour. I was there at *Star Clipper* in St. Louis and from my vantage point it seemed somewhat surreal. Strangers converge on store and mill around. Celebrity arrives, fans line up, get autograph and leave. I thought afterwards that perhaps there should have been a welcoming or fanfare and hoopla or something. I'm glad to read that there was in fact more to your trip than what I saw and that you got the opportunity to see some of our town. It's not such a bad place. Thanks for visiting. Thanks also for signing my books and for signing one for my friend not in attendance. I hope to see you on the next tour.

Chris A. Schott
715 Briar Fork Road
Des Peres, MO
USA 63131

It is a little surreal. You arrive to find a crowd of well-wishers and you know you're done when you're all alone. That's why I put the bit with the last tree sketch on the end of the Petuniacon issue.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Greatly enjoyed meeting you and Gerhard at the Chicago stop of the *Cerebus* tour. Part of the fun was not simply in meeting and talking to you two, getting some stuff signed, and (as it happened) buying some artwork, but waiting to see how the Chicago stop would later be described in the monthly "Note

From The President". What follows are some impressions from the other side of the table.

My friend Scott and I figured that we would beat the Sunday rush at the convention itself by showing up Saturday for the Lincoln Park signing at Moondog's, little expecting that the line of autograph seekers would wind all along the inner circumference of the store. We ended up standing in line for two hours, one of us periodically dashing outside to plug the meter for the car. Having the video playing of the making of the Flaming Carrot/*Cerebus* team-up issue was a good idea. By the time we got to the front of the line, you were starting to show some shell shock and were having to shake the tension from your writing hand. In Hell, the famous sign autographs for eternity. You were, however, still your typically gracious self, signing and drawing the requested characters without any noticeable grimaces of pain.

Turned out that the line was not nearly as long, next morning, at the convention—since the convention was northwest of Chicago, a lot of downtown Chicago fans had apparently decided that it was easier to get their signings done on Saturday at Moondog's. So that gave me the opportunity to buy some artwork, page 15 of issue #152, which is now framed. One of my reasons for choosing that page is that it works very well visually, even out of the context of the story. There are three strong tiers of panels showing cheering crowd, Cerebus striking with his sword, and a dying Cirinist, clearly defining the relationships of all pictured. There is also the nice framing device of having white "Hail Cerebus" cries above and black diamonds of "Kill him" below. And finally, the page has a carefully rendered crowd scene, which includes the bonus appearance of fan favorite Eddie Campbell's *Deadface*.

My wife laughed at your dedication to her in the copy of *Free Cerebus* you signed. In it she is described by you as potentially "just some bimbo he was trying to score with." If she had not laughed, I would probably be typing this letter on the fire escape of our apartment with mosquitoes for company.

I was a bit disappointed by the actual convention. I had hoped that with you as the featured guest, the dealers would be selling more black-and-white comics and eclectic items, but aside from *Cerebus* material it was pretty much your standard superhero bill of fare. Just ink, paper, and a couple of staples to hold it together.

My reasons for going down to see you at the convention are a blend of any typical letters page and very familiar to you by now. I had read comics as a kid and in high school, but pretty much stopped after that. I didn't become a full-fledged convert back to the medium until I came into contact with *Cerebus*, which was mentioned in an issue of CoEvolution Quarterly (now renamed Whole Earth News), along with *Love and Rockets*, as one of the "really good" comics out there. I bought the current issue of *Cerebus* and the first of the Swords collections, read those, then returned to the comic store and bought the remaining Swords collections, the *High Society Phone Book*, and the issues needed to bring me up to date. Just the concept of a black-and-white comic that had more on its agenda than drugs and sex was mind-opening, and inspired me to get back to the drawing board myself, disinterring comic characters that I had buried after high school and also trying new types of stories. You ended up publishing a single page comic of mine ("Fear Forest" in issue 25 of *High Society*) in 1990, and I've included some of my more recent work for you to see with this letter.

Anyway, good to finally meet you. Enjoy the rest of the US tour, and try to take some time out to relax on occasion.

Eric Schaller
1047 Sherman Ave.
Madison, WI
USA 53703

Isn't that weird? How all the dealers have the same material? On the spur of the moment, Carol Denbow at Star Clipper decided to forego her usual convention stock (because it was raining if I remember correctly) at a show and took graphic novels and hardcovers and stuff instead. She made out like a bandit. This was how I managed to persuade her to try the same thing in her store; carry the stuff no one else is carrying instead of competing for all the same Marvel zombie customers everyone else is fighting over. It works! It works!

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

When I first started reading comics (as opposed to collecting them), there was a candy store between my school and home. If it ever had a real name, I never knew it; the owner's name was Maxie, so we called it *Maxie's*. It was a real old-fashioned type candy store. You could get penny candy, soda from a fountain, big soft pretzels stacked on a spindle and comics. The new comics came in on Wednesday and I would be there when Maxie cut the cord on the stack. He'd let me look through them before he put them out and I thought this was a pretty big deal. Archie and the JLA were my faves, but as I got a little older, I just kinda drifted away from comic books.

During my early teenage years, I took a ride with my dad to a new butcher he'd been going to. Right next door, there was a place called *Pinocchio's*. In one window, they had all kinds of magic tricks and practical jokes. In the other were those giant-sized treasury editions of the Hulk and Thor and Batman, and those posters taken from comic panels of guys like the Silver Surfer and Iron Man. When I went in, the right wall was filled with cardboard boxes that were filled with old comics in plastic bags. I was amazed! Old comics were always ripped and tattered and found in junk stores. Now, not only was there a store semi-devoted to them, they were in good condition and worth a lot more than originally. I not only started reading comics again, I began collecting back issues. I remember being very into the *Avengers* and Gene Colan's *Daredevil*.

As an older teenager, I used to like to hang out in Greewich Village, check out the record stores, see whoever at the *Bottom Line*, whatever. While wandering around one day, I cam across the *Village Comic Shop*. When I went in, I knew I as in a *real* comic store. No candy, no magic tricks, just comic books and comic book stuff — pins, posters, T-shirts and more. This was the place I discovered the world beyond Archie, Marvel and DC. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles?* What the hell kinda name for a comic book was that? And what was this one? The cover had a small grey figure in a bathrobe, chasing someone who looked like Moon Knight. Nothing was ever the same after that.

When I moved from Brooklyn to

Jacksonville, a few years ago, there were two important things I had to find; 1) a job, 2) a comic book store. I was going to a used bookstore that also carried comics when a newspaper article led me to a place near work, *Xeno's*. Not only was I back in a real comic store (now known as a comic book specialty shop), but if I filled out a list, they would pull my comics for me, before they were even put out on the shelf. When I came in, my comics would be waiting for me. I would never hear the words "sold out" again. I thought that this was a pretty big deal

Over the years, *Xeno's* has changed locations and expanded their stores, but they are still awfully good to me. If something special comes out that isn't on my pull sheet, they'll hold a copy for me. If a bunch of special stuff I've ordered comes in all at once, I can pick some of it up next week, no problem. But a couple of weeks ago, I got the best surprise. Frank and Mary, the owners, went to the Diamond Trade show. When I came in Friday afterwards, Mary called me over and showed me pictures of guys like Stan Lee, Jim Shooter and (surprise) you, Dave. Then she gave me a copy of the jam piece you, Colleen Doran and Martin Wagner had done, complete with autographs and head sketches. I don't remember the last time I was so touched. Every fan boy should be so lucky to have a store like *Xeno's* and part of the reason for this letter is to thank them for never making me feel like just a customer.

Mary mentioned that you were saying that while you appreciated the dealers that carried *Cerebus*, that they needed to be out there pushing it a little more. You've got a proven record as an independent publisher, you weren't going to disappear on them, etc. (I'm paraphrasing, now). She said you made her feel a little guilty. At the *Xeno's* branch I shop at, there's only one other *Cerebus* reader. Anyway, remembering what you said in the letters column of #158 about us fans making the ultimate sacrifice and lending out our back issues made *me* feel guilty. So the next week, I packed up my *Swords* and told Jeff, who works at *Xeno's* and will probably crease my covers for a month for not mentioning him 'til the end of this letter, to give the aardvark a try. If he liked it, my collection was at his disposal (hey, I trusted him with my Ren & Stimpy tape, I could trust him with my *Cerebus* collection).

That's the other reason for this, Dave; to thank you. Not only for the autograph and head sketch, but just for *Cerebus* in general. It, too, is appreciated.

Dominick Glespen
4375 Confederate Pt. Rd., 19D
Jacksonville, FL
USA 32210

I didn't mean to make Mary or yourself feel guilty. I remember thinking how nice it was of her to wait all that time in line (the average wait was about two hours) just to get something autographed for a customer. I don't think dealers are obliged to push Cerebus, but I don't think it's asking too much for them to make sure that they have one copy, at least, of each of the reprint volumes at any given time considering that I'm devoting twenty-six years of my life to a comic book that will only be sold in comic book stores.

★★★★★★★★★★

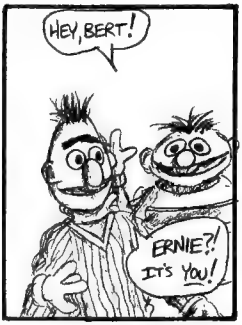
Authentic,
Original
MATT FEAZELL
Convention Sketch

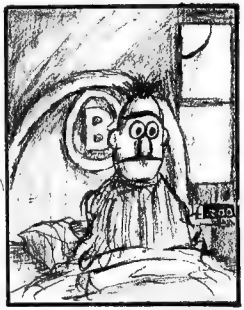
Gift from Jeff Lilly who interviewed me on Detroit's *Hero Reviews* cable TV show on comics.

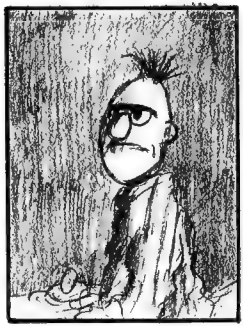
I STILL THINK OF YOU, JIM HENSON

BY CHRIS AUBRY

ERNIE AND BERT ARE © SOMEBODY ELSE.







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111 NORTH CENTRAL AVE.

* OCTOBER 3 • *ATOMIC COMICS (MESA)*

OCTOBER 18 SEATTLE

THE RED LION HOTEL
18740 PACIFIC HWY. SOUTH

* OCTOBER 16 • *ZANADU COMICS (DOWNTOWN)*
* OCTOBER 17 • *ZANADU COMICS (UNIVERSITY DISTRICT)*

NOVEMBER 1 PORTLAND

THE MARRIOTT
1401 SW FRONT STREET

* OCTOBER 31 • *FUTURE DREAMS (EAST BURNSIDE)*

NOVEMBER 15 NEW YORK

RAMADA HOTEL 33RD & 7TH

* NOVEMBER 13 • *JIM HANLEY'S UNIVERSE (W. 32ND STREET)*
* NOVEMBER 14 • *JIM HANLEY'S UNIVERSE (STATEN ISLAND)*

NOVEMBER 22 CLEVELAND

RAMADA INN
24801 ROCKSIDE ROAD (BEDFORD HEIGHTS)

* NOVEMBER 21 • *SUPER CITY COMICS*

DECEMBER 13 HOUSTON

SHERATON GRAND
WESTHEIMER EXIT AT I-610

* DECEMBER 11 • *PAPER HEROES (KILLEEN)*
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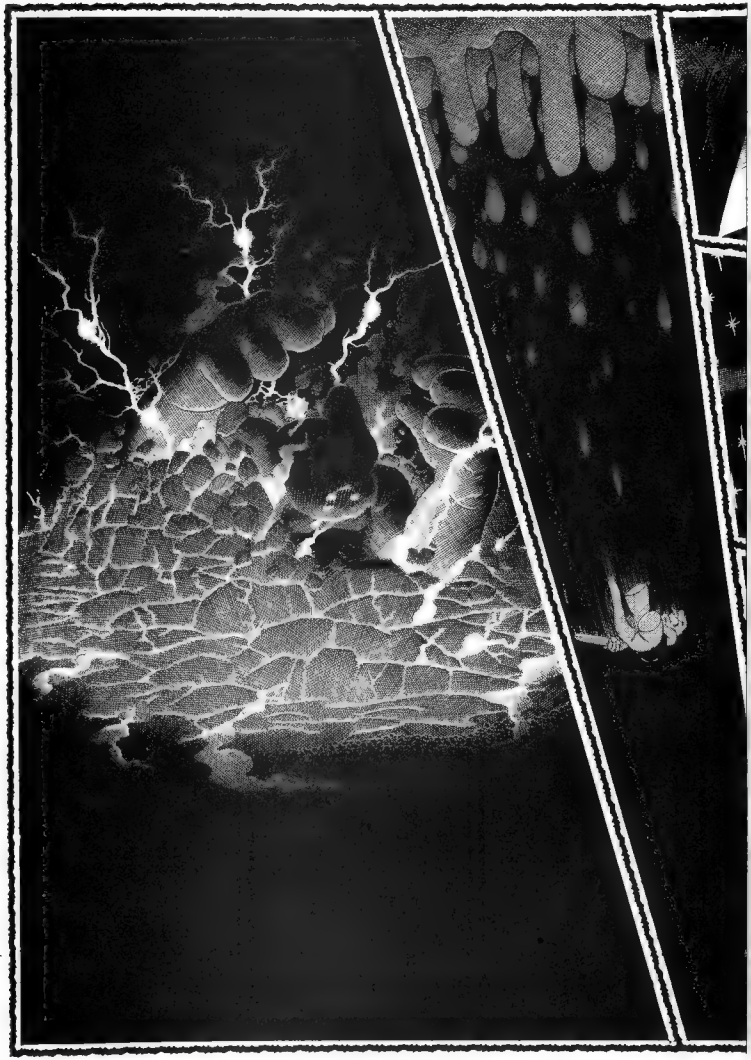
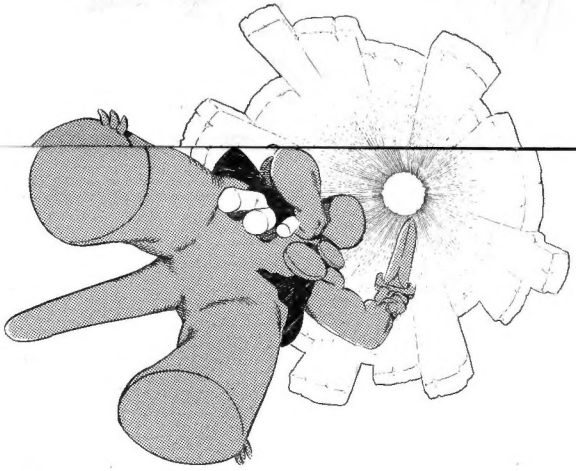
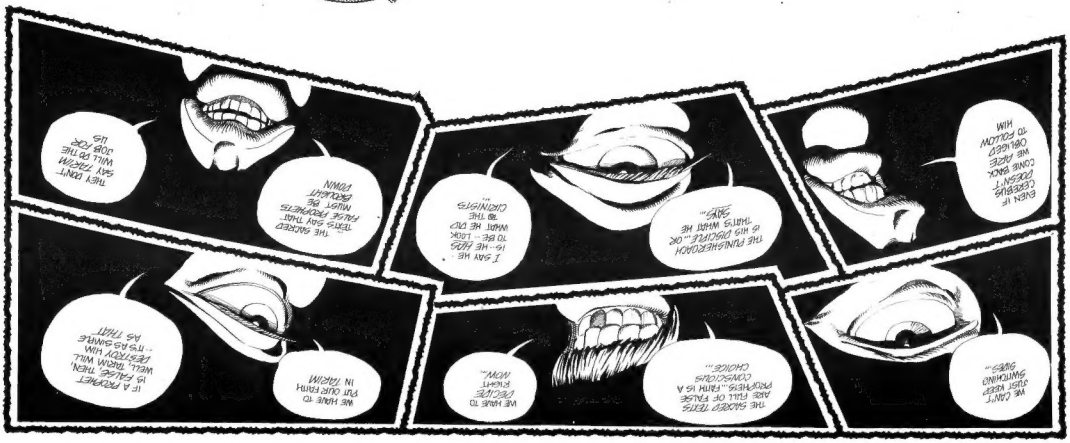
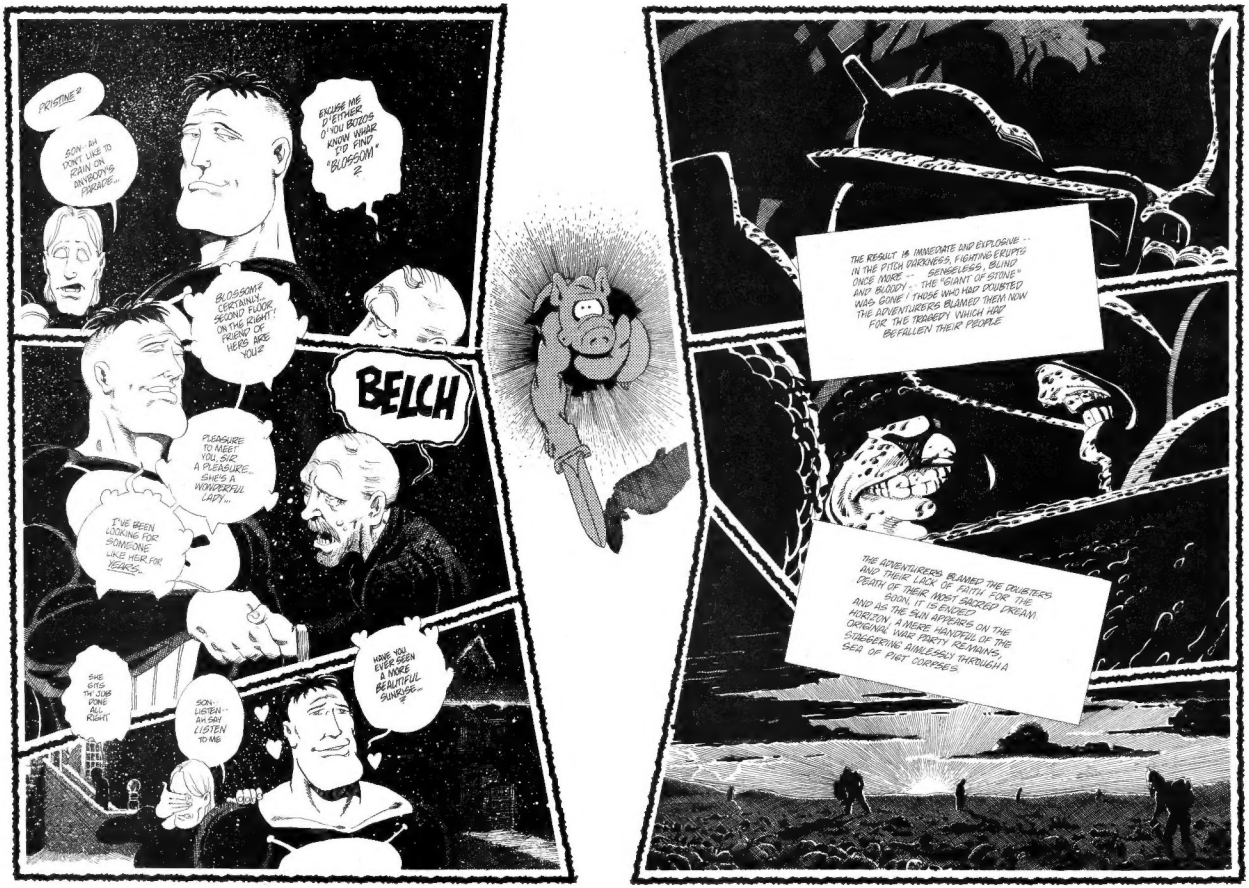


FUCK ME
LOBOROACH
FRAG!
FRAG OFF!
MOTHER FRAGGER!
FRAG YOU!
OH!
FRAG ME
FRAG ME
FRAG ME
OH!
OH!
OH!
OH!
CABLE REALM
TOO HEAVY
TIN?
VENOM
MY VENOM
START·NG TO
TO
AHR HAMMOND AWAKENED ME A SHORT TIME AGO!
CONCERNING THE DIMENSIONS OF THE SPHERE!
THEY'RE
YES?

HOW MANY TIMES IN HISTORY HAS TEST BEEN INVADED?
'GOING ALONG' IS THE ONLY ANSWER.
WHEN THE ORTHODOX TARIMITES ARE IN CONTROL, I'M AN ORTHODOX TARIMITE.
WHEN THE CIRINISTS ARE IN CONTROL I'M A CIRINIST.
IF CEREBUS COMES BACK?
"ALL HAIL MOIRTHOLY"
FOR NOW?
FOR NOW I'M A COCKROACHITE OR A COCK-ROACHIAN OR WHATEVER WE'RE CALLED
IT'S ALL AN ILLUSION... THE ROACH, CIRIN, CEREBUS
ALL OF IT...
TIME AFTER TIME THE ONLY BELIEF THAT PROVES TO BE CORRECT...
ILLUSIONISM.
I LIKE THE CIRINISTS... THE STREETS ARE SAFER NOW
I HOPE THEY KILL ROACH-MAN SO WE CAN ALL BE SAFE AGAIN AND STOP WORRYING...
NO, NO LISTEN
IT'S REALLY ALL BEEN SAID BEFORE... AND NOTHING EVER CHANGES
I JUST GET TIRED OF ARGUING...
BUILDING AUTOMATIC CROSS-BOWS, HARVESTING CROPS...
ALL THE SAME TO ME...
JUST TELL ME WHERE TO REPORT FOR WORK IN THE MORNING




EVEN IF CEREBUS DOESN'T COME BACK WE HAVE OBLIGED TO FOLLOW HIM
WE CAN'T JUST WAIT SOMEHOW...
THE FUNERGOAN IS HIS OBJECT... OR THAT'S WHAT HE SAYS...
I SAY HE IS - HE HAS TO BE - LOOK WHAT HE DID TO THE CIRINISTS...
THE SCORED TETS ARE FULL OF FALSE PROPHETS... TRUTH IS A CONSCIOUS CHOICE...
WE HAVE TO REALISE RIGHT NOW...
THERE'S SOMETHING IN TARIM
IF A PROPHET IS FALSE, THEN WELL, THEN PERHAPS HIM - IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT
THE SCORED TETS FOR OUR FAITH MUST BE FRAUDULENT
THEY DON'T SAY THEIRS WILL BE THE JOB FOR US


PRISTINE?
SON--AH DON'T LIKE TO JOIN ON ANYBODY'S PARADE...
EXCUSE ME D'EITHER D'YOU BOZOS KNOW WHARE D'D FIND "BLOSSOM" ?
BLOSSOM? CERTAINLY... SECOND FLOOR, ON THE RIGHT! FRIEND OF HERS ARE YOU?
BELCH
PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, SIR! A PLEASURE... SHE'S A WONDERFUL LADY!...
I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR SOMEONE LIKE HER FOR YEARS...
SHE GITS TH' JOB DONE ALL RIGHT!
SON: LISTEN... AH SAY LISTEN TO ME!
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A MORE BEAUTIFUL SUNRISE...
THE RESULT IS IMMEDIATE AND EXPLOSIVE... IN THE PITCH DARKNESS, FIGHTING ERUPTS ONCE MORE -- SENSELESS, BLIND AND BLOODY! -- THE "GIANT OF STONE" WAS GONE! THOSE WHO HAD DOUBTED THE ADVENTURERS BLAMED THEM NOW FOR THE TRAGEDY WHICH HAD BEFALLEN THEIR PEOPLE
THE ADVENTURERS BLAMED THE DOUBTERS AND THEIR LACK OF FAITH FOR THE DEATH OF THEIR MOST SACRED DREAM. SOON, IT IS ENDED! AND AS THE SUN APPEARS ON THE HORIZON, A MERE HANDFUL OF THE ORIGINAL WAVE PARTY REMAINS, STAGGERING RUDDLESSLY THROUGH A SEA OF PIGT CORPSES.

CEREBUS

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